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Defense Minister Said to Order Ship 'Neutralized'

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PARIS, Sept. 24 — A leading French newspaper said today that the order for French agents to take action against an antinuclear protest ship in New Zealand was given by Charles Hernu, who was then Defense Minister.

The newspaper, *Le Monde*, reconstructing the operation in which the vessel was sunk, said Mr. Hernu had probably given a spoken order to the French intelligence agency to "neutralize" the ship.

Le Monde said that funds for the operation were approved by senior officials in the offices of President François Mitterrand and Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, but that neither leader had been informed of the operation in advance.

The protest ship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, was operated by the environmentalist group Greenpeace. It was sunk in Auckland Harbor on July 10 by a bomb that also killed a Greenpeace photographer on board.

Mr. Hernu resigned as Defense Minister on Friday, saying that his subordinates had failed to disclose the truth about the ship's sinking.

3 Reportedly Questioned

Meanwhile, three soldiers, two of them officers in the French intelligence agency, were being held for questioning today on suspicion of having given secret information to the French press about the operation against the ship, *Reuters* reported.

One of the intelligence officers, identified only as Captain Borrás, admitted having given information on the sabo-

tage operation to journalists, the agency reported.

The *Le Monde* account today said Mr. Hernu, the Defense Minister, had given a "political green light" to the operation against the *Rainbow Warrior* after supervisors of the nuclear testing sites in French Polynesia reported that Greenpeace might try to land a flotilla of small boats on Mururoa atoll, where tests are carried out.

The reconstruction of the operation in *Le Monde* was an attempt to answer the major unresolved question: Who gave the order to sink the vessel?

On Sunday, Prime Minister Fabius admitted for the first time that French intelligence agents, acting under orders, carried out the attack. But he did not say who had ordered the sabotage or who had known about it in advance.

No Major New Revelations

The *Le Monde* account was largely pieced together from the known facts of the Greenpeace affair and did not contain any major new revelations.

Nonetheless, the thrust of the newspaper's version of events was likely to counter widespread speculation in the press and among political figures that the operation could not have occurred without the advance approval of Mr. Mitterrand and Mr. Fabius.

Another newspaper, *La Croix*, today published an interview with an unnamed former Chief of Staff of the army, who asserted that Mr. Mitterrand would "necessarily" have been informed of the operation in advance.

In contrast, *Le Monde* said that from what is known, it could be inferred that neither Mr. Mitterrand nor Mr. Fabius knew about the operation in advance.

Le Monde quoted Bernard Tricot, who carried out a Government investigation of the affair last month, as saying of Mr. Hernu: "He probably didn't say, 'Sink that boat for me,' but probably, 'Take care of things.'"

According to this version of events, Mr. Hernu's order was then transformed into an operation to sink the Greenpeace vessel by officials of the intelligence agency.

The newspaper also raised some unanswered questions, particularly about the role of Mr. Mitterrand's military adviser at the time, Gen. Jean Saulnier. General Saulnier reportedly may have authorized the release of \$300,000 for the operation.